DCI/IC · 73-/07/

19 September 1973

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SUBJECT :-- Plan of Action for COINS -- File Improvement

1. This draft plan focuses on actions that can be taken starting immediately to advance and improve COINS. Major, complex plans are being formulated for the longer range -- including plans for computer netting, multi-level security, on-line query and response, et al. This paper does not focus on those longer run aspects, but rather identifies the constructive steps that can be undertaken now by the DCI and ASD(I) to improve the present configuration of COINS and to demonstrate that this project is being pushed forward in a determined way.

2. The area in which to focus short-run steps to improve COINS relates principally to the improvement of the files, both those now in the system and those which can be identified and placed in the system under the present COINS configuration. The following paragraphs propose concrete steps and illustrate how to go about each task identified.

3. File content and coverage. COINS files principally provide specific individual items of information, usually about Order of Battle or Installations. There is little evaluated and integrated data, the product of a more sophisticated type of intelligence analytic effort. The question is: how to upgrade content, how to improve coverage? To this end, the task proposed in this paragraph is to involve USIB committees and IC/PRG to help develop the content guidance, to validate the need for particular kinds of data, to accept a degree of responsibility for seeing to it that certain files are developed, including summary files that eventually permit trend and statistical analysis. ASD(I) has been given a responsibility for conducting an interagency COINS files working group, and that group is now at work. The involvement of USIB committees and IC/PRG would supplement the working group effort, but be independent of it.

Caveat. ASD(I) has a claim to be involved with the DCI in working out an approach to the involvement of USIB committees in a project for which ASD(I) has been designated Executive Agent. This needs to be accomplished in a manner acceptable to the DCI. We should be careful not to get out in front of the DCI by permitting ASD(I) de facto participation in USIB matters or the USIB forum.

4. File cross-referencing and notations for users. Present and potential file users need guidance in using COINS files easily and effectively. All files should contain cross-references and other notations to assist users to ascertain information such as the following: what does the file contain? what is omitted? what other files relate in a subject sense or hierarchically? what is the status of the data as respects currency of content? who, i.e., what organizational component, is responsible for creating and maintaining the file? to whom should further inquiries be directed? The task proposed in this paragraph is to examine each file now on COINS or projected hereafter for COINS to insure that appropriate cross-references and guidance notes for users appear therein. This could be done in an orderly way by the present interagency files working group, as a continuation of their present assignment. In addition, IC/PRG could contribute by making a number of tests for the purpose of expressing their user/analyst-oriented view on what kinds of guidance notations should be included; this could provide an authoritative frame of reference for the Solat committee to use in working out the procedural details.

5. File reliability. This involves improving the assurance to the would-be user that certain files said to be in the system actually are there, that they are actually up to date in accordance with the updating schedule, that they actually contain all that their official published descriptions claim. This involves assigning official responsibility to specified organizations for the creation, maintenance and quality of files. It also involves monitoring the performance of that organization in doing this job. [   ] comments summarizing   STAT his perceptions from the recent PFIAB meeting on COINS make the point that "the community ought to be educated that storage and retrieval of information is a part of the intelligence process." The task proposed in this paragraph could be carried out through the interagency files working group, which would be an appropriate body to find facts and make recommendations. The recommendations have resource recommendations. To implement those recommendations, my tentative view is that it would be desirable to have them emenate from the DCI, wearing either a USIB or IRAC hat; this would also permit IC/PRG an opportunity to share in this process.

> Caveat. The alternative is to have ASD(I) implement within DOD, and have ASD(I) request DCI and D/INR to implement in CIA and State. I do not favor this because it puts ASD(I) in a community role that I think belongs to the DCI.

Parenthetically, these considerations get us into the question of how to define ASD(I)'s role as "Executive Agent"for COINS, as well as the phrase "under the auspices of".

6. File incompleteness. File improvement includes making a determined effort to eliminate as many security and dissemination limitations as can be dispensed with. Here, the effort is to remove the barnacles of institutional parochialism, while preserving security and dissemination limitations that really can be justified. The task proposed in this paragraph has two parts: first, to illustrate the problem; second, to attack it. The former aspect can be accomplished with the help of IC/PRG; [   ] has already STAT prepared one case example and is undertaking several more, to demonstrate the different results that sometimes are obtained when one queries an agency file as a member of that agency and when one asks the same question of the version of that file which appears in COINS and is available to persons outside the originating agency. My tentative plan, when these samples are complete, is to disseminate them to Solat and the interagency files working group, and call on that body to propose solutions. Solutions will not be achieved quickly or easily, to the extent that they involve agency-imposed security limitations on the dissemination of information collected under a variety of sensitive conditions. Ultimately, when the problem is properly organized, with supporting evidence, and a clear delineation, it could appropriately come to a focus in USIB, with decisions required by the DCI in consultation with agency heads. USIB is the appropriate forum and the DCI the ultimate decision-maker because this matter is clearly one of "sources and methods." Another aspect of this problem appears to relate only to the incompleteness of the COINS file, due to arbitrary limitations in the COINS computer programs; this sort of difficulty, when encountered, is not policy-related, and ought to be solvable at a technical level.

7. Standardization of data elements and codes. The COINS Project Manager has urged that USIB/IHC work on this matter, and in the past the IHC has made efforts to promulgate standards (see IHC Document 127/27, 13 December 1972, USIB Data Standard: Armed Service Grade). This matter formerly came under OMB Circular A-86 of 30 September 1967, implementing Public Law 89-306. By Executive Order 11717, 9 May 1973, the OMB responsibilities were transferred to the Department of Commerce. DCID 1/15, Data Element and Data Standardization for Intelligence and Intelligence Information, is one of the package of

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DCIDs drafted for Mr. Helms' signature but never signed. It cites OMB Circular A-86 and states that "the IHC will establish methods and procedures for developing and maintaining data elements, data codes, and related features to be used in the intelligence community." The task proposed in this paragraph is first to ascertain the DCI's present policy as to whether DCID 1/15 can now be used and referred to as a basis for IHC action; if so, this topic could be placed on the agenda for an early IHC meeting which would discuss the organization and work of a sub-group of the IHC to be responsible for this matter. I am not now prepared to propose a specific method of attack on this very complex question. The IHC files of past efforts and discussions make it clear that this is a subject that could involve large amounts of time and manpower. With future manpower limitations and the nature of the subject, it is probably not practicable to adopt other than a selective approach. That needs to be defined. Agency-perceived perogatives and sensitivities are very much involved. The selective approach should include focus on the areas of COINS where it appears particularly worth the effort to fight the battle of standards.

8. _Analytical content of files._ File improvement includes demonstrating an intention to upgrade COINS files in terms of their substantive/evaluative content. At present, most COINS files offer only factual data, such as Order of Battle or Installations. Files reflecting the product of analysis and integration of data are largely absent. This point was made clearly by members of the PFIAB Science Panel at their review of COINS earlier this month. The challenging question is: how to place within COINS files of a much higher quality of substantive content, in order to stimulate the use of this system for a much more sophisticated type of analyst use? Some persons experienced with the process of intelligence analysis at higher levels express doubts as to whether a machine system can ever share directly in the process of reasoning by which intelligence judgments are arrived at. It may not be necessary to address that question directly, since a machine system can contribute to some kinds of analytic thought with a greater level of sophistication than is now reflected in COINS. For example, [   ] IC/PRG, is now involved in a very significant effort to develop an interchange of appraisals of current operational matters in a National Intelligence Community Watch Officers' Net, resulting in end products called Watch Officers' Bulletins and Notes. This form of analysis of current events is one in which the information being evaluated can be structured and formatted, and is thus easily capable of computer manipulation.

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The task proposed in this paragraph is to support [   ] current efforts. The IHC Staff   STAT

is assisting with technical support related to setting up a communications net for watch officers

and is investigating technical capabilities for video display of documents and data in a user

STAT   network. [   ] believes that the hard copy products of the Watch Officers Net could be

an interesting file for COINS, both as illustrative of how to go about formatting an analytic

file for data manipulation by computer, and as a sample of a file for COINS that is more

substantive than those presently available in the system. If one is looking for evidence of

progress in the short term, this offers an interesting and hopeful possibility.

9. Analytical content of files (cont). A second project that would get to the heart of

the question as to how far highly substantive files could be placed in COINS also involves

IC/PRG. This project, if undertaken, would explore some of the so-called branch files in CIA.

These have been the crown jewels of the working level analyst, upon which he places principal

dependence. For the most part, these are hard copy, although they may be supplemented with

computer routines in some cases. An exploration, which could be spearheaded by [   ]   STAT

STAT   [   ] in IC/PRG, for example, aided by IHC staff, could look into sample

files to identify what it would take in the minds of the user analysts to satisfy them that

some COINS substitute could do all or part of the job now done by their branch files. A

comparable exploration in DIA could be headed by [   ] or one of the military members   STAT

of IC/PRG. I would emphasize that the branch file question is as tough a problem as any

that is likely to be encountered in the effort to evaluate the ultimate capabilities of a COINS-like

system to aid substantive analysis. It may be too early to tackle this very tough question, but

reference herein at least identifies the topic for future consideration.

10. COINS evaluation mechanisms. File improvement includes the development of some

form of COINS network management information and evaluation system, principally to serve

the COINS Project Manager, Sub-System Managers, and ASD(I) and DCI overview authorities.

STAT   [   ] has this in mind, and he talks in terms of development of mechanisms for doing

a better job of measuring the use of COINS, its performance, and its utility. This aspect of

COINS improvement includes steps to improve our own understanding of the real character of

potential user interest in files for COINS. In turn, that gets us into the distinction between

information thag the user "must have" versus the information that is "merely nice to know but

not essential." There are cost implications here too. The bundle of evaluation mechanisms

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that I visualize under this general heading involves an effort by ⬚ office to improve its   **STAT**
statistics and methods of measurement -- this depends in part on funding that Hicken has re-
quested for FY-74. There is a role for the Solat interagency files working group, because it
can serve as a vehicle, in addition to Hicken's office, for collecting data on the specific costs
and character of use of COINS files. The IC/PRG could also be involved because PRG is in
the best position in the community to provide guidance on how to appraise and characterize
user interest and user performance. The task proposed in this paragraph is to start with an

STAT ad hoc dialogue between ⬚ and IC/PRG representative(s), to take a fresh look
STAT at what ⬚ present statistics appear to tell us and how they could be made more mean-
ingful. An additional result of looking again at ⬚ statistics and related information should **STAT**
STAT be to call on ⬚ to produce an informational package descriptive of COINS that would be
appropriate as a briefing aid for an audience meeting COINS for the first time. There seems to
me to be a need for such a package, characterizing what COINS really is now, what it is not,
what it does, what it doesn't do, and the like. I formed this impression listening at the recent
PFIAB meeting to the several varieties of conceptions and misconceptions as to what COINS

STAT is, does, and should be. ⬚ has lots of figures, but I have not yet seen or heard him present
the COINS story in utter, direct simplicity to an audience that is not going to be able or
willing to follow him into the myriad details and technicalities of the project. A non-technical
briefing package, addressed particularly to analytic content and capabilities of COINS, would
be helpful. It is what is needed now to assist in discussions with analysts and resource mana-
gers as to what COINS could mean to them if properly developed.   **STAT**

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Acting Chairman
Information Handling Committee

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